



2139 Silas Deane Highway  
Suite 205  
Rocky Hill, CT 06067  
(860) 257-8066

Raymie H. Wayne, Ph.D., JD, MSW, President  
Stephen A Karp, MSW, Executive Director  
[naswct@naswct.net](mailto:naswct@naswct.net)

## **Appropriations Public Hearing**

### **Testimony on H.B. 5030**

**February 14, 2014**

Submitted by: Carissa Sfakios, MSW, Legislative Chairperson

Good afternoon members of the appropriations committee. My name is Carissa Sfakios and I am a social worker and chair-person of the Education and Legislative Action Committee with the CT chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. I am writing today on behalf our membership base and also on behalf of the individuals we work with.

This testimony is an appeal for the State of Connecticut to allocate budgetary funding toward hiring additional staff within the Department of Social Services. (DSS). We commend Governor Malloy for previously increasing staffing within these state offices, however more staff is urgently needed in order to address the growing need of the lives impacted by the recession. Early retirements offered by the state have also played a role in this shortage that is increasingly growing into a crisis situation.

Rather than providing you with data and numbers on this issue I would like to share a sample of anecdotal accounts from fellow social workers and Connecticut residents who are desperately trying to access services in order to address recovery, food security, homecare and basic health care needs. In many cases, these folks are fighting for their lives.

I can share with you that social workers and consumers alike are reporting up to 3 hour wait times while on hold with DSS regional offices after receiving termination of benefits letters. They have learned over time that paperwork gets lost. As a result they are sending these forms in through certified mail. Still, they receive a letter from the state with the dreaded “ Termination of benefits: You did not complete the application process”. Upon getting a representative on the phone they are often told they will need to go to their regional

office in person where they will face long waits and limited answers as documents sent through the scanning centers have not yet been processed.

Another example includes a woman struggling with depression, unemployment and subsequent loss of insurance coverage. While working toward recovery and gaining employment this woman also faced the arduous task of trying to secure HUSKY insurance. This process took over 6 months and 3 applications as DSS misplaced two of those applications. In the meantime she accrued hefty medical bills for the mental health treatment and medications that she needed as part of her recovery.

Often, the most demoralizing stories we are hearing are those from individuals living with dementia, chronic and persistent mental illness, and physical and cognitive impairments that are losing their HUSKY medical benefits. If they are lucky they have an exhausted caretaker that can help them navigate this process. Otherwise, they quietly and often unknowingly go without the food, the health care and support they are depending on.

It is important to acknowledge that the Department of Social Services has put forth effort toward efficacy and efficiency in their processes. The new scanning centers and Connect CT are two examples. The Connect CT website works great for individuals that have access to and knowledge of how to use a computer and navigate a website or have a social support that can help them, otherwise, Connect CT becomes another barrier to accessing DSS. The scanning centers appear to be causing delays and confusion in processing and applications are still getting lost.

In closing, my hope is that today the compelling stories and faces of those before you act as a catalyst toward improving these processes within the DSS offices. We strongly believe that hiring more staff is the first step toward achieving this goal. Thank you for taking the time to hear these testimonies today.